

Underwater World doubles as penguin research centre

LANGKAWI: Not only has Underwater World Langkawi (UWL) here attracted masses of tourists, its Rockhopper and African Penguin breeding centre has also been chosen by university students to do their research.

General manager Abdul Razak Abdul Aziz said UWL, the country's largest aquarium at Jalan Pantai Cenang, which started its operations in 1995, had been a breeding centre for the two species of penguins for 10 years.

"It is one of the factors that attracted university students in choosing UWL to carry out their research or get practical exposure," he said.

He said universities in Australia and Denmark had established cooperation with UWL aside from local universities, such as Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

"We are in negotiations with an agricultural university in India, which is interested in sending their students here," he said.

He said other than tourism operation, marine biology and veterinary were the main fields of study of the university students who came to UWL.

Razak said UWL's penguin breeding initiative began in 2006 and its first African penguin chick hatched



Some of the **penguins at Underwater World Langkawi** in Jalan Pantai Cenang. File pix

on March 17 the same year, while the first Rockhopper chick hatched on Sept 9, 2007.

"Because of this success, we have maintained the breeding effort and it is ongoing.

"We have a curatorial department

manned by 24 staff, including a veterinary doctor, who are involved in monitoring the penguins," he said.

He said the survival rate for penguins that hatched at the centre was 60 per cent, which was among the

highest compared with similar centres in other parts of the world.

Razak said other zoos in the region had shown interest in acquiring penguins from UWL. In 2013, 15 African penguins were sent to a zoo in Hanoi, Vietnam.

He said the success of the programme had spurred UWL to initiate the breeding of other marine life.

"We are conducting experiments on the breeding of sea horses and fish species," he said. **Bernama**